

Multimedia Lesson Fourteen:

Surviving in 1980s Cambodia



In this interview, a middle class Khmer woman describes her strategies for survival and

advancement in the difficult period of the Heng Samrin/Hun Sen regimes in Cambodia in the 1980s. Note the contrast between her description (and fear) of the forest-clearing work groups which the government drew from the ranks of young people her age, and the romantic view of these groups in the comic book excerpt which follows.

A Propaganda Comic from the 1980s

This comic is typical of many published under the watchful eye of the 1980s Cambodian State Socialist government. At this time Cambodia was occupied by Vietnamese troops, who had driven out the Khmer Rouge in 1979. The Khmer Rouge sought refuge in camps on Thai soil, and with the direct assistance of the Thais and Chinese and the indirect assistance of the United States, they continued to strike against the "State of Cambodia" government as guerrilla forces throughout the 1980s. The government, under Heng Samrin and later Hun Sen, imposed a number of projects and programs on the populace to try to preserve the fragile nation and "build socialism." These included collectivized farms, Marxist-Leninist education, restriction of foreign influence, and forest-clearing on the Cambodian-Thai border in northwestern Cambodia. The latter is the subject of this comic, titled " ជីវិតថ្មីលើទឹកដីកំពង់ព្រះ ".



The forest-clearing campaign was highly dangerous work in which many young Khmers lost life and limb to land mines, malaria and other hazards. Its purpose was to deprive the Khmer Rouge guerrillas of forest cover in which to hide and launch their attacks on villages and government troops.

The program, known officially to the government (and also to people in their late teens and twenties,

who understandably feared being “drafted” into service by it) as “ក ៥”, was referred to in government propaganda campaigns as “ពលកម្ម” (“power [of the people]”) បំពេញពលកម្ម (“fulfilling your duty to serve as part of the power of the people”) and ការពារមាតុភូមិ (“safeguarding the motherland”). These and other terms you’ll see in the comic are typical of the propaganda language of this period.

សំណាប	young rice plants (from seed, not transplanted)	យុវកសិករ	“young farmer”
ខៀវស្រងាត់	deep, rich blue color	កណ្តាប់	bundles to be transported
សម្រស់	freshness	ឆ្នើម	supreme; above all else
ក្រុមសាមគ្គី	“solidarity group” (collectivized farm work group)	មេដាយ	medal (from the French)
ប្រយុទ្ធ	to struggle; a favorite verb of the State Socialist regime	ពលកម្ម	power
មមាញឹក	busily	ទល់ដែន	border
		មាតុភូមិ	motherland
		ធំធេង	spacious, vast (elegant term)



វស្សានដូរ... វាលស្រែ
 ទាំងឡាយនៅលើទឹកដីកម្ពុជា
 ក្រាលដោយ សំណាបនិងស្រែង
 ខ្សែវិស្វភាគ ។ នៅក្នុងស្រែង
 ធម្មជាតិដីស្រែង ក្រញូមនេះ
 កសិករក្រុមសាមគ្គីនានាទូទាំង
 ប្រទេស កំពុងសប្បាយវិភាយ
 ប្រយុទ្ធការងារជីកស្រែ យ៉ាងមហា
 ពោក ។
 យុវកសិករ ម៉ីល នៅក្នុង
 ក្រុមសាមគ្គីមួយ ក្នុងភូមិ
 កំពង់ព្រះ កំពង់ឃ្នុរនេះ
 ដឹកគោរូប... ។

Our hero ម៉ែល exchanges pleasantries with the workers in the fields, in particular ម៉ែ, who is his love interest in the story. She then asks him where he's been for so long that she hasn't seen him around...





បងម៉ែលទៅពលកម្ម ដល់ទ្រុងសប្បាយទេ?
និយាយរោយឡើយ ស្តាប់ដឹង!

ត្រូវទ្រុងអញ្ចឹង! ខ្ញុំមាន
ឡើយ និយាយដឹងបង
បុរសយើងស្តាប់ទ្រុង
ណាស់!



តាំងពីក្តីតមកដល់ឆ្នាំនេះ ខ្ញុំមិនដែលបាន ធ្វើដំណើរទៅ
ណាឆ្ងាយទេ! ទើបតែពេលនេះ យាយសារពលកម្មការពារ
មានគ្រប់ទើបខ្ញុំបានទៅដល់ទ្រុងសប្បាយទេ ។ ខ្ញុំបានឃើញ
ទឹកដីដ៏ធំលាយនៃមាតុភូមិយើង មានវាលដំណើរព្រៃ
ភ្នំព្រះស្រីលាវ ដឹងអរ ឃើញគ្រប់
ស្រុកជាទ្រុងសប្បាយប្រជាជន
យើងរស់នៅយ៉ាងសុខសប្បាយ... ។